

Case 2816

Catharacta antarctica lonnbergi Mathews, 1912 (currently *Catharacta skua lonnbergi*; Aves, Charadriiformes): proposed conservation of the subspecific name

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Abstract. The purpose of this application is to conserve the subspecific name of *Catharacta skua lonnbergi* Mathews, 1912 (family STERCORARIIDAE). The name is in universal usage for the brown skua of the subantarctic region but is threatened by the unused senior subjective synonym *Stercorarius antarcticus madagascariensis* Bonaparte, 1856, for which suppression is proposed.

Résumé. L'objet de cette requête est de conserver le nom subsppécifique de *Catharacta skua lonnbergi* Mathews, 1912 (famille des STERCORARIIDAE). Ce nom, dont l'usage est couramment accepté pour le Skua brun de la région subantarctique, est menacé par le nom inemployé *Stercorarius antarcticus madagascariensis* Bonaparte, 1856, synonyme subjectif plus ancien, dont on propose ici la suppression.

1. Bonaparte (1856, p. 207) described a skua obtained off the coasts of Madagascar and named it as a subspecies *madagascariensis* of *Stercorarius antarcticus* (Lesson, 1831) (p. 616). The completed vol. 2 of Bonaparte's work is dated 1857. However, dates printed with the signatures indicate that it was published in parts between 1854 and 1856 (see also Woodward, 1903, p. 194). Pages 193–232 of vol. 2 bear the date 1856 and this has been adopted here for the name *madagascariensis*. The name was largely ignored by subsequent authors and Saunders (1876, pp. 321–322; 1896, p. 320) synonymized it with *S. antarcticus*. Hartlaub (1877, pp. 380–382) accepted the synonymy and published measurements of Bonaparte's specimen (no. 1992–392 in the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris).

2. Mathews (1912 (January), p. 212) described *Catharacta antarctica lonnbergi* based on a single bird (specimen no. 3755) from 'New Zealand Seas'. This specimen, an

adult male formerly part of the Rothschild collection, is in the collection of the American Museum of Natural History, catalogue no. 744457. Mathews also described the egg (1912 (April), p. 55). A year later (1913, p. 484) he elevated the taxon to specific rank and (p. 494) proposed three subspecies: *C. l. lonnbergi* (pl. 122) from New Zealand, *C. l. intercedens* from the Kerguelen Islands and *C. l. clarkei* from the South Orkneys. However, he has been little followed; Hamilton (1934, p. 174) synonymized *intercedens* and *clarkei* with the nominate *lonnbergi* and treated this as a subspecies of *Catharacta skua* Brünnich, 1764. Since Hamilton's work the taxon *lonnbergi* has been variously considered to be a species, or a subspecies of either *skua* or *antarcticus*. These taxa have been included either in *Stercorarius* Brisson, 1760 or in *Catharacta* Brünnich, 1764. Today most authors agree on the trinomen *C. skua lonnbergi*, in accordance with the taxonomic conclusions of Hamilton (1934), Devillers (1978) and Furness (1987).

3. Brooke (1978, p. 296; 1981, p. 144) resurrected the name *madagascariensis* Bonaparte, 1856 and, on the grounds of a re-examination of the holotype by Dr J.-L. Mougin and by Drs C. and J.-F. Voisin, adopted it as a senior synonym of *C. skua lonnbergi*. This was followed by Voisin (1979, p. 79 and footnote; 1984, p. 15), but Clancey (1981, p. 197) continued to use the name *lonnbergi*, noting *madagascariensis* as a synonym. Brooke did not publish measurements for the type specimen of *madagascariensis*, the identity of which has long been controversial. Those given by Hartlaub (1877) suggest that it is a specimen of the South Polar skua *C. maccormicki* (Saunders, 1893) (p. xii), rather than the brown skua, even if its culmen length is somewhat long for that species (Furness, 1987). Our own measurements of the same specimen (culmen length 56.5 mm, tarsus length 85 mm, middle toe 76 mm, wing length (tip broken) 370 and 365 mm) do not agree with those of Hartlaub; they bring Bonaparte's specimen well within the size range of *C. skua lonnbergi* and completely out of that of *C. maccormicki* according to the table of measurements given by Furness (1987) and our own observations. Moreover, the shape and sculpture of the bill are clearly those of *C. skua lonnbergi* (Brooke, 1981, personal observations). We do not know why Hartlaub's measurements are so different from our own but our re-examination of Bonaparte's specimen proves beyond doubt that it is a small male of *C. skua lonnbergi* and not of *C. maccormicki*, as has already been stated by Brooke (1978, 1981). If tarsus length, which is the most diagnostic character in discriminating *Catharacta* specimens (Brooke, 1978; Furness, 1987), is considered alone Bonaparte's specimen could be a New Zealand bird but the fact that it was taken far away from any known breeding ground of the brown skua makes it difficult to apply the name *madagascariensis* to any known breeding population of the species. Many years ago Milne Edwards & Grandidier (1885, p. 644) included *madagascariensis* in *antarcticus* but commented that Bonaparte's specimen was 'remarquablement petit'.

4. Strict adherence to the Principle of Priority would lead to the very undesirable introduction of the name *Catharacta skua madagascariensis* (Bonaparte, 1856) for the taxon which until now has consistently been called *lonnbergi* Mathews, 1912. The name *madagascariensis* has rarely been used whereas *lonnbergi* has been used by almost all authors, particularly since Hamilton's (1934) work. The name has appeared in check lists as well as taxonomic and ecological works (see, for example, Peters, 1934, p. 310; Holgersen, 1957; Downes, Ealey, Gwynn & Young, 1959, pp. 103–111; McLachlan & Liversidge, 1978, p. 204; Parmelee, 1985; Pietz, 1987; Sibley & Monroe, 1990, pp. 253–254). A list of a further 18 references published in the last 40 years demonstrating

usage of the name is held by the Commission Secretariat. The taxonomy of the skuas is most difficult to interpret and has taken a considerable effort to clarify; the use of *madagascariensis* instead of (or, more likely, in addition to) the accepted name *lönnerbergi* would add confusion to this complex taxonomic situation.

5. The International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature is accordingly asked:

- (1) to use its plenary powers to suppress the subspecific name *madagascariensis* Bonaparte, 1856, as published in the trinomen *Stercorarius antarcticus madagascariensis*, for the purposes of the Principle of Priority but not for those of the Principle of Homonymy;
- (2) to place on the Official List of Specific Names in Zoology the name *lönnerbergi* Mathews, 1912, as published in the trinomen *Catharacta antarctica lönnerbergi*;
- (3) to place on the Official Index of Rejected and Invalid Specific Names in Zoology the name *madagascariensis* Bonaparte, 1856, as published in the trinomen *Stercorarius antarcticus madagascariensis* and as suppressed in (1) above.

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